STOP TELLING
ME TO BUY
CRAP!

What is branded trash?

It is literally what the tin says.

Whilst absentmindedly looking at the trash that litters our daily journeys—from walking and cycling to travelling by train, passing through airports, or relaxing at the beach—we do not realise that all these discarded, logo-bearing objects are doing more than just polluting; they continue to send messages, even in their post-mortem state.

They are silently communicating with us, stubbornly refusing to be ignored.

A piece of litter bearing a logo, abandoned on the beach, is the equivalent of a paid billboard on the side of a highway—perhaps less visible but far more pervasive, long-lasting, and way more economical for the company given it's totally free.

Most importantly, the blame is shifted to the consumer, the one physically, practically and recklessly doing the littering.

Branded Trash explores the concept of product displacement, highlighting the tragically ironic contrast between the intentional-unintentional placement of branded products in everyday life and their ultimate fate as discarded litter.

While product placement in media aims to seamlessly integrate products into our perception of reality, blurring the lines between advertising and everyday life, product displacement reveals the unintended consequences of consumerism.

When products are correctly placed in their intended context, they seamlessly integrate into the illusion created by advertising, just like the agreement between a spectator and an actor in a performance. This integration reinforces the desired connection between the consumer and the brand, maintaining the coherence of the narrative.

However, when a product is displaced and ends up as litter, it disrupts this illusion and agreement. The cognitive dissonance arises as the intended context is shattered, revealing the real-world consequences of consumerism.

This rupture can be seen as a rip in the fourth wall moment, where the viewer is abruptly confronted with the consequences of their own role/actions as a consumer and the environmental impact of their choices. This disruption challenges the seamless integration of the product into the advertising illusion, exposing the underlying contradictions and prompting reflection on the true costs of consumer culture.

The photographs in Branded Trash capture the transformation of once-desirable branded products into litter, challenging the illusion created by advertising.

The images try to raise questions about consumer culture, environmental responsibility, the lasting impact of our choices, and most especially the responsibility of brands.

It serves as a commentary on the paradoxical relationship between advertising, consumption, and the consequences of product disposal, encouraging viewers to reflect on the hidden costs behind the glossy images of branded products in everyday life.

The constant presence of logos and brands has become an integral part of our everyday existence, subtly influencing our consumer decisions. This phenomenon is not new; it has become so ingrained in our lives that we have come to accept and perceive it as a normal process.

The sight of littered packaging, cans, and bags on our streets serves as an inadvertent form of advertising, a form of passive-aggressive publicity, granting companies free promotion without their active involvement.

If you think that having your company associated with a pile of trash is bad, think again.

There is no such thing as bad publicity.

> *The root of the climate change problem can be traced to an instrumental relationship with materiality and human relations. To recover from the climate crisis equitably, we need to move away from economies and cultures where everything and everyone, including waste packaging (as highlighted by Policardo), is exploited for value extraction. Moreover, it is essential to challenge the cultural assumptions about our identity as a species in the Anthropocene. Grosz, by queering Darwin's work, theorizes that art does not separate us from other species but aligns us with them. According to Grosz, art rooted in sexual selection transforms materials and environments based on desire and movement towards other ways of being, rather than mere survival.*
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> *The capacity of visual culture to reveal the unseen and show in new light (instead of, or as well as, telling and informing) is emphasised in Policardo's Branded trash: (In) voluntary product displacement. Photographs of discarded containers with sometimes faded and crumpled, but still clearly identifiable logos appear like still lives, carefully lit and staged like a product placement. Adding an air of glossy value to 'worthless' waste, these images raise awareness of – and in doing so are complicit within - the enduring, free advertising of litter. This project brings to light the circulation of value that not only spurs further ecological destruction but accumulates deeply uneven benefits and losses.*

→ AC Davidson, University of Huddersfield, 2021

One of the main issues with this project is aptly summarized by Prof. A.C. Davidson of the University of Huddersfield, who pointed out a paradox in my work—a contradiction that I have always been aware of.

There is something fascinating about trash. It always catches your eye.

The power of a faded can of Pepsi left for years under the sun, next to a thriving bunch of mushrooms sitting peacefully in the woods next to my hometown, just a few kilometres from the border.

That's my first memory of human dumped trash.

The faded blue and the Pepsi logo—Pepsi, not Coca-Cola. Despite both brands entering Yugoslavia in the late 1960s, I've always perceived Pepsi as somewhat of a socialist drink. For a long time, I even believed that Pepsi was unique to Yugoslavia, given that its color palette mirrored the Yugoslav flag. I wonder if Pepsi's success in Eastern Europe was partly due to this fortunate color association. Or was Pepsi more popular in Eastern Europe alltogether? Maybe I'm just weaving a narrative around a childhood memory of a faded Pepsi can I found in the woods when I was 8 or 9.

This association is so strong that, in my mind, Coca-Cola didn't even exist in Yugoslavia before 1990—though I know that's not true. Coca-Cola, like Pepsi, was introduced in Yugoslavia in the late 1960s. This was a time of controversy, as both brands, particularly Coca-Cola, were seen as symbols of American capitalism.

Then, there's the intriguing story of Cockta, the distinctly Yugoslav and socialist alternative to these imperialist soft drinks—or the various imitations that emerged as counter-imperialist beverages across Eastern Europe.*

Sadly though, this is not a series about Yugo Nostalgia or Eastern European fizzy drinks. This is a series about litter and brands, and how much humanity is reflected in the trash it generates.

* Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties , Radina Vučetić, Central European University Press (June 20, 2018)

Logo-bearing cans and packages are now everywhere, not only Coca Cola. The kingdom of logos and brands has permeated everything, from our society to more literally and practically our daily life, our streets, our oceans, our woods.

Branded Trash is not just simple trash.
It is not ***just*** another environmental disaster.

Branded trash is advertising.

Unpaid for by the brand, insidious and everywhere, a point of focus for our busy brains and eyes; endless product placement in the movies of our lives.

It doesn't matter where I am now, or what my tastes are. Pepsi will always and overpoweringly taste of nostalgia.

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Branded Trash

(In)Voluntary Product Displacement